

Social Protection:

A Constituent Element of the New Development Paradigm

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Perhaps the key role that ANND had aspired to has been the monitoring of public policies and their accountability, particularly in the economic and social spheres. The role of civil society organizations does not stop at working to provide services for those in need, empowering the poor economically and legally, or coordinating with government bodies to achieve such tasks. It calls for much more, especially with the decline in the protective role of the state and the shrinking capacities and public resources to provide care for citizens, in parallel with the increased need for welfare, due to population growth, on one hand, and the impact of sharp transformations in lifestyles on the level of production and consumption, on the other hand.

Brief Historical Overview

Since the 1960s, most Arab states adopted an economic approach involving the implementation of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs), which entailed shrinking the role of the state through cuts in public spending, introducing free market mechanisms, and strengthening the role of the private sector, aiming to increase rates of economic growth. Promoters of this approach are convinced that economic growth would lead to generating jobs, thus benefiting society as a whole. In the mid-1980s, such policies became known as the Washington Consensus, after the international financial institutions (IFIs) who are permanently based in Washington DC. These measures led to the reduction of the role of the state in providing public services and strengthened the role of the private sector, which aimed to make profits from investments. However, to encourage such investments, several measures were adopted to reduce the burden on investing companies, such as direct taxes on income, tax breaks, currency exchange rates, and interest rates, in addition to reducing the burdens related to providing basic rights for labor.

These measures had a negative impact on economic, social, and cultural rights of citizens, leading to an increase in mobilizations calling for the restoration of those rights. In turn, this led to an escalation in suppressive measures

by governments, aiming to prevent any political transformation, even if it had been the choice of the citizens. Thus, and after sacrificing economic, social, and cultural rights, the political system and civil rights began to shrink; restrictions were imposed on freedom of opinion and expression, the right to assembly and organizing demonstrations and sit-ins was curtailed, and the creation of political parties and workers' unions was prohibited.

These circumstances multiplies the types of roles played by emerging civil society organizations in developing countries, established on the margins of governments reluctant to provide services and aiming to complement and replace them. NGOs transformed from being voluntary initiatives by citizens, mostly charitable, into becoming a broker delivering basic services to citizens, victims of SAPs, who actually needed assistance the most.

With the accumulation of needs, the expanding base of those marginalized by the concentration of wealth, the breakdown in redistributive mechanisms, and the absence of parties, political currents, and oppositional movements for workers demands due to the repression, CSOs found themselves in the midst of confronting such tasks imposed by the situation.

They witnessed a transformation of their role, from partners in service delivery and absorbing the resentment of the deprived, marginalized for the sake of social stability and civil peace, into the role of influencing public policies, particularly in promoting the establishment of good governance and calling for the adoption of public policies that answer the needs of citizens. This gradual shift in role did not merely target decision makers in developing countries; it extended its reach to IFIs and the states with actual control and ability to influence their decisions.

UN-sponsored international processes regarding human development – from the Earth Summit in Rio (1992) to the Millennium Summit in 2000 – contributed to creating a space for civil society to follow-up, monitor, and attempt to

influence governmental tracks. With the spread of Globalization and the increased influence of the international factor on domestic policies, civil society became increasingly attentive to international processes. International networks began emerging in various disciplines and fields, including those monitoring public policies in the social, economic, and environmental sectors, which could lead to violating the basic rights of citizens.

This led to the establishment of the Social Watch mechanism, which began monitoring policies based on human rights standards, instead of merely documenting violations, despite the major and pioneering role played by rights organizations in their field and during that period. The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) was established in this period as a framework bringing together human rights, development, environmental, and women's organizations to promote Arab participation in international fora on developmental processes, in addition to building civil capacities to confront local policies and governments aiming for more centralization and defending the interests of a particular segment, which took advantage of the transformations and was able to influence public policies and protect its interests.

Arab organizations contributed to the Social Watch through yearly reports to monitor social policies, especially in the areas of poverty and gender equality. Through this mechanism, and in coordination with ANND, they also contributed to various international conferences and forums, accumulating experience, until the launch of the Arab Social Watch in early 2010.

Soon after, popular revolutions erupted around the Arab world demanding justice, freedom, and a dignified life. ANND became more convinced of the need to promote the role of civil society in defending economic and social rights and the formulation of appropriate policies. To achieve this, there was a need to generate novel concepts for development, based on the human rights approach, which are inalienable and indivisible, in addition to commitment to enforce the fundamental rights of citizens.

The first report, published in late 2012, analyzed the right to work and right to education as two interlinked rights, which appeared to be a priority in the region, especially for young people. The report concluded that Arab states need to

adopt a new developmental approach, where the states play a key and active role in adopting economic choices, formulating general orientations, and safeguarding citizens' rights. This developmental approach is based on the shift from a rentier and service based economy into a productive economy directed primarily to the local and regional markets, instead of being designated for export. This is in addition to adopting wealth redistribution policies and programs to achieve social justice for citizens.

Based on this conclusion, ANND started to develop its research capacities and focused on the constituent elements of the proposed developmental approach, particularly policies related to investment and its relation with production and manufacturing, distribution policies through taxation, subsidies in government programs, and the partnership between the public and private sectors.

This second report of the Arab Watch on Economic and Social Rights was produced in this context and as an extension of these efforts. It focuses on one of the more sensitive issues, social protection systems as a human right and a redistribution mechanism, contributing to the achieving a measure of social justice and social security.

This report contains 13 national reports completed through the commendable efforts of experts who are committed to defending human rights. They were prepared using a participatory approach involving partners and militants and reviewed by experts and activists. The report also incorporates research and analysis papers from experts in the regions, as well as some contributions from other parts of the world.

A new addition is the scientific section on social protection indicators, which will allow the use of this report to measure progress and assess the impact of efforts of civil society organizations, in the aim of developing social protection policies in the long and winding road towards social justice.

My unlimited gratitude all those involved in the report, its authors, reviewers, and editors and everyone who contributed through discussion and follow-up.